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Shultz Firmly in Command

'He Just Keeps on Coming,' Observer Says

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One year after his most humiliating defeat within the Reagan administration, Secretary of State George P. Shultz has become the central figure in U.S. foreign policy.

In undramatic fashion, through gradual accretion of authority and steady elimination of rivals, Shultz has become the senior executor and shaper of President Reagan's global policies. Shultz and Reagan, by all accounts, have developed an increasingly warm rapport.

"He is the tortoise who moves ever so slowly, but he just keeps on coming and finally wins the race against the hares," said a highly placed State Department veteran.

Another experienced observer described Shultz as "an unsophisticated thinker about foreign affairs" who tends to simplify, sometimes oversimplify, important issues. "He has none of [Henry A.] Kissinger's virtues of brilliance, but fortunately he doesn't have Kissinger's vices either . . . He's low-key, persistent and unextremist." The longer Shultz remains in the job, the official said, the more he is master of the foreign policy process.

Since his successful arms control talks a month ago in Geneva with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko, Shultz has become notably more self-confident in public and in the private councils of the administration. In addition to arms control, which has been an area of in-

tense bureaucratic dispute, Shultz has grasped the previously elusive reins of policy in Central America and dominates U.S. policy toward the Middle East and southern Africa.

Last October, for example, national news organizations were informed by telephone calls from Capitol Hill that Shultz, then on a visit to Panama and Mexico, was on the eve of signing a secret four-part deal with Nicaragua.

It was denied by senior officials and didn't happen. State Department officials said they traced the reports to the office of Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) and Constantine C. Menges of the National Security Council staff.

In late December, conservatives protested that Shultz was preparing to replace their favorite political ambassadors with career officers. The protest does not seem to have changed Shultz's plans for a personnel shuffle, except to create soft-landing jobs for some of those being displaced.

Shultz's trouble is "he hasn't recognized that one of the major obstacles to carrying out Reagan's policies is the State Department," said Burton Y. Pines, vice president of the Heritage Foundation.

Like the man himself, Shultz's concept of his job is simple, self-effacing and undramatic. If asked for his objectives, Shultz will begin in the fashion of a professor—which he was at the University of Chicago and Stanford—to cite "the advancement of United States national interests."

If asked about his methods, Shultz speaks of tending the soil of diplomacy as a gardener would—digging, planting and nourishing relationships with other nations. There is little here of grand strategy, diplomatic brinkmanship or brilliance, but his concept seems to be working for this administration at this time.

EXCERPTED